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ABSTRACT

Change efforts should be guided with a systemic understanding of the context in which they are undertaken. Depending on the circumstance, or as the implementation effort progresses, it may be most effective to focus interventions on a particular component of the framework at a time. This ERIC digest presents a sequence for approaching the major perspectives, or "models," of educational change in the research. Anyone trying to improve schools may look to "The New Meaning of Educational Change" (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991) to decide where to start. From there, "Systemic Change in Education" (Reigeluth and Garfinkle, 1994) can be read to consider the system being changed. Once the change process has begun, "The Change Agent's Guide" (Havelock and Zlotolow, 1995) can be read for discussion of how to guide and plan future efforts. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall and Hord, 1987) provides tools to "keep a finger on the pulse" of change and to collect the information needed. "Strategies for Planned Change" (Zaltman and Duncan, 1977) can help narrow down the cause(s) of resistance to change efforts. "Diffusion of Innovations" (Rogers, 1995) identifies the most influential attributes of an innovation, and the "Conditions for Change" (Ely, 1990) can help address obstacles that arise from the environment in which change is implemented. (Contains 10 references.) (AEF)

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ERIC® DIGEST

September 2000 EDO-IR-2000-07

A Survey of Educational Change Models

By James B. Ellsworth

This Digest is based on *Surviving Change: A Survey of Educational Change Models* by James B. Ellsworth

Change isn't new, and neither is its study. We have a rich set of frameworks, solidly grounded in empirical studies and practical applications. Most contributions may be classified under a set of major perspectives, or "models" of change. These perspectives are prevalent in the research, and combine to yield a 360° view of the change process. In each case, one author or group of authors is selected as the epitome of that perspective. A small group of studies from disciplines outside educational change (in some cases outside *education*) also contribute to key concepts not found elsewhere in the literature.

Everett Rogers, one of the "elder statesmen" of change research, notes that change is a specialized instance of the general communication model (Rogers, 1995, pp. 5-6). Ellsworth expands on this notion to create a framework that organizes these perspectives to make the literature more accessible to the practitioner.

The change framework might be summarized as follows: a *change agent* wishes to communicate an *innovation* to an *intended adopter*. This is accomplished using a *change process*, which establishes a channel through the *change environment*. However, this environment also contains *resistance* that can disrupt the change process or distort how the innovation appears to the intended adopter. By *uniting* these tactics in a *systemic strategy*, we improve our chances of effective, lasting change.

Putting it All Together

Change efforts should employ a systemic understanding of the context in which we undertake them. Nevertheless, depending on the circumstance, or as the implementation effort progresses, it may be most effective to focus interventions on a particular component of the framework at a time.

Anyone trying to improve schools (teachers, principals, students, district administrators, consultants, parents, community leaders, or government representatives) may look to *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991) to decide where to start (or to stop an inappropriate change).

From there, *Systemic Change in Education* (Reigeluth & Garfinkle, 1994), considers the system being changed, and assumptions about the nature of that system (its purpose, members, how it works, its governing constraints and so forth). *Question those assumptions*, to see whether they still hold true. Look *inside* the system to understand its subsystems or stakeholders and how they relate to one another and to the system as a whole. Look *outside* the system too, to know how other systems (like business or higher education) are interrelated with it, and how it (and these other systems) in turn relate to the larger systems of community, nation, or human society. The new understanding may illuminate current goals for the proposed innovation, (or concerns for the change you are resisting) and may indicate some specific emerging issues.

This understanding is crucial for diagnosing the system's needs, and how an innovation serves or impedes them. *The Change Agent's Guide* (Havelock & Zlotolow, 1995) helps to guide and plan future efforts. The *Guide* serves as a checklist to ensure that the right resources are acquired at the proper time. The *Guide* also helps to conduct and assess a trial of the innovation in a way that is relevant and understandable to stakeholders. It extends implementation both in and around the system…and helps to prepare others within the system to recognize when it is time to change again.

At some point one must commit to a plan, and act. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model [CBAM] (Hall & Hord, 1987) provides tools to "keep a finger on the pulse" of change and to collect the information needed. This model's guidelines help readers to understand the different concerns stakeholders experience as change progresses. This will help readers to design and enact interventions when they will be most effective.

Even the most effective change effort usually encounters some resistance. *Strategies for Planned Change* (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977) can help narrow down the *cause(s)* of resistance. Perhaps some stakeholders see the innovation as eroding their status. Possibly others would *like* to adopt the innovation, but lack the knowledge or skills to do so. Opposition may come from entrenched values and beliefs, or from lack of confidence that the system is *capable* of successful change.

One way to approach such obstacles is to modify or adapt the innovation's attributes. Even if the actual innovation cannot be altered, it may be possible to change the perceptions of the innovation among stakeholders. For example, instead of competing with them, perhaps it is more appropriately seen as a tool that will help others achieve appropriate goals. Whether one modifies the attributes or merely their perceptions, *Diffusion of Innovations* (Rogers, 1995) identifies the ones that are generally most influential, and will help readers select an approach.

Other obstacles may arise from the environment in which change is implemented. The "Conditions for Change" (Ely, 1990) can help you address those deficiencies. Possibly a clearer statement of commitment by top leaders (or more evident leadership by example) is

needed. Or maybe more opportunity for professional development is required, to help the stakeholders learn how to use their new tool(s).

Change models are frequently interrelated. For example, when modifying innovation attributes pursuant to Rogers (1995), one might make a component checklist (see Hall & Hord, 1987) to avoid accidental elimination of a critical part of the innovation. When assessing the presence or absence of the conditions for change (Ely, 1990), verify that the systemic conditions mentioned in Reigeluth and Garfinkle (1994) are present as well. While using the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 1987) to design interventions aimed at stakeholders at a particular level of use or stage of concern, consider the psychological barriers to change presented by Zaltman and Duncan (1977).

Reaching Out, Reaching Across

Much useful knowledge of the change process comes from other fields as well—particularly the business-inspired domains of Human Performance Technology (HPT) and Human Resource Development (HRD). Include these other knowledge bases as an involvement with educational change grows.

Reach out to other disciplines to share experiences and to benefit from theirs. Reach across to other stakeholders, to build the sense of community and shared purpose necessary for the changes that must lie ahead. The road won't always be easy and everyone won't always agree which path to take when the road forks...but with mutual respect, honest work, and the understanding that we all have to live with the results, we can get where we need to go.

Succeeding Systematically

The lessons of the classical change models are as valid today—and just as essential for the change agent to master—as they have ever been. Yet a single innovation (like a new technology or teaching philosophy) that is foreign to the rest of the system may be rejected, like an incompatible organ transplant is rejected by a living system. Success depends on a coordinated "bundle" of innovations—generally affecting several groups of stakeholders—that results in a coherent system after implementation.

These are exciting times to be a part of education. They are not without conflict...but conflict is what we make of it. Its Chinese ideogram contains two characters: one is "danger" and the other "hidden opportunity." We choose which aspect of conflict—and of change—we emphasize.

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